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SUBJECT: THE LESOTHO LIBERATION ARMY (LLA): BACK FOR MORE?

REF: a) Maseru 436; b) Maseru 439

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Lesotho Liberation Army, or LLA, is an aging insurgent group dating back to the 1970's which appeared to rest in obscurity until several of its former members were recently implicated in attacks on ministerial residences. Born out of opposition to the dictatorship of post-independence Lesotho, the LLA launched a guerilla war against the GOL in 1978 and was largely defeated in 1979. After sporadic LLA bombings and ambushes in the 1980's, the group was called back to Lesotho from exile in Botswana and South Africa in 1990, but the Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) reneged on offers to fold its ranks into the regular military. There is no evidence to indicate that the purported reemergence of the LLA is anything more than a handful of jobless former insurgents, with no identifiable political support, reduced to begging for handouts. Their apparent involvement in recent attacks, however, either undermines the GOL's adamant theory that elected opposition parties are the sole perpetrators or suggests that the political parties may be hiring local mercenaries to weaken the LCD government. END SUMMARY.

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Guns Reclaimed, LLA Responsible?  
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12. (U) In the early morning of July 19, 2007, the Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) and the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) launched a joint operation east of Maseru in an attempt to recover weapons stolen from military guards at ministerial residences in June 2007 (ref A). Military and police forces recovered eight Israeli-made Galilee rifles, two M-16 rifles, a 9 mm pistol, two army radios, and an assortment of ammunition during the operation. A man named Kantu Pakela was arrested during the action, and another man named Setsoto Ranthimo was killed during a firefight with authorities. According to police sources, a cab driver who transported the two men tipped off police after he suspected the men were carrying rifles. The remaining weapons were found in a derelict house along with two boxes of AK47 ammunition, and an assortment of military-style clothing and equipment. The LMPS later verified that the recovered weapons were among those stolen in the June 2007 attacks.

¶3. (U) In a separate operation, Thabiso Mahase, the estranged husband of High Court Judge Mahase, was found with a cache of illegal weapons. In this operation, Judge Mahase's home was searched by police, leading to an outcry among opposition figures and the Lesotho Law Society who claimed that the search was related to her recent rulings against the GOL (ref B). Thabiso Mahase is still at large. According to police, the link between Kantu Pakela, Setsoto Ranthimo, and Thabiso Mahase is their well known status as former members of the LLA. But what is the Lesotho Liberation Army?

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The History: The LLA is Born  
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¶4. (U) In January 1970, Lesotho held its first general election following attainment of independence in 1966. Fearing that the governing Basotho National Party (BNP) would be defeated, Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan declared a state of emergency and suspended the constitution prior to the announcement of election results. Under pressure from cabinet members and paramilitary leaders, Jonathan jailed opposition leaders. The 1970 election was annulled and Jonathan ruled Lesotho by decree.

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Coups and Defeats  
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¶5. (U) Militants within the opposition Basotholand Congress Party (BCP) led by Ntsu Mokhele attempted to stage a coup in 1974 and fled into exile after its failure. The coup attempt strengthened the government's hand and cast the BCP as a violent faction, reducing its domestic standing. The BCP then created the LLA as its armed wing. Masquerading as the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), the paramilitary wing of the anti-apartheid Pan African Congress (PAC), the LLA received military training in Libya. The group whose membership numbered in the hundreds then moved to Tanzania, whose government disarmed the group following a protest from the Government of Lesotho. In 1978, 178 members of the LLA entered Lesotho with outdated weapons to launch a guerilla war. The majority of these guerillas were defeated by the Lesotho Paramilitary Force (a predecessor to the current armed forces, the LDF) and Lesotho's Police Mobile Unit in northern Lesotho in 1979.

¶6. (U) The then-BCP leader subsequently sought assistance for the LLA from the apartheid regime in South Africa. South African-based American mercenary Bob MacKenzie began training new LLA recruits. [NOTE: Mr. MacKenzie was the son-in-law of senior Nixon-era CIA official Ray Steiner Cline, leading to a number of wild conspiracy theories regarding U.S. involvement in LLA activities. END NOTE.] Because of Lesotho's heavy criticism of the apartheid regime, South Africa began to allow the LLA to use its territory to launch attacks against the Mountain Kingdom.

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¶17. (U) Throughout the early 1980's, the LLA claimed responsibility for periodic bombings in Maseru, ambushes of government officials, and attacks on police stations. The South African government denied the GOL's claims that the LLA launched attacks from their territory. Prime Minister Jonathan became increasingly strident in his anti-apartheid proclamations, and relations with South Africa continued to deteriorate. This deterioration reached a new low on December 9, 1982, when South African troops entered Lesotho and raided the homes of alleged African National Congress (ANC) members in Maseru, killing 42 individuals.

¶18. (U) The BNP government ruled by decree until January 20, 1986 when a military junta overthrew it. The Military Council that came to power granted executive authority to King Moshoeshoe II, who was previously a ceremonial monarch. In 1989, exiled BCP members, including LLA soldiers, began returning to Lesotho under the new government's national reconciliation policy. Military government chairman Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya was ousted in 1991 and replaced by Major General Elias Phisoana Ramaema. Ramaema ceded power to a democratically elected BCP government in 1993.

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LLA Disbands, But Find No Home

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¶19. (U) As a condition for the return of the LLA and other exiled BCP members to Lesotho, the LLA agreed to disband and be incorporated into the LDF. However, widespread opposition within the LDF to this integration led to unrest in the army culminating in fighting among opposing army factions in January ¶1994. In the aftermath of this confrontation, the LDF did not allow LLA members to be folded into their ranks. While some former LLA members found jobs in government (including several as members of Parliament) and in the private sector, most were unemployed and left to fend for themselves without government support. In letters to donors, they reported becoming disillusioned by the lack of support from the new GOL.

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¶10. (U) In 1997, the ruling BCP split, and most LLA members remained with the BCP rather than joining the new factions. Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle formed a new party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), and created a new government with the support of a majority of Parliament. Pakalitha Mosisili (Lesotho's current Prime Minister) then succeeded Mokhehle as party leader, and the LCD won the general elections in 1998. Opposition political parties rejected the election results, however, leading to a downward spiral ending in political meltdown and the burning of large portions of Maseru. Amid the chaos of 1998, former LLA members appealed to the government to no avail to address their needs.

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## Begging for Support, Getting Little

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¶11. (U) In September 2004, ex-LLA members launched the Lesotho Liberation Army Veterans Association (LLAVA). A steering committee wrote a letter to the BCP and all of its splinter factions asking for financial assistance. An LLAVA press release stated that the organization was created to provide support services for ex-LLA members and their families. Former LLA members met Prime Minister Mosisili in 2006. While the Prime Minister promised to look into their grievances, the LLAVA has not received any GOL support to date. In recent months, LLAVA sent letters to resident international organizations and diplomatic missions, including the U.S. Embassy, requesting financial assistance for income generating projects for their elderly members who are no longer able to participate in the labor force.

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## An Inconvenient Political Truth?

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¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: The LLA's long history closely tracks that of independent Lesotho itself. As LLA veterans appeared to be reduced to begging for GOL and donor handouts, the possible reemergence of remnants of the group has surprised some local observers, but poses no visible threat to the current political equation. The LCD-led government of Lesotho firmly and unequivocally places the blame for recent attacks on the nation's legally elected political opposition (particularly the All Basotho Convention party under Thomas Thabane). Police allegations that former LLA members may be involved, however, either undermines the GOL's adamant theory that the opposition parties are the sole perpetrators or suggests that the parties may be hiring local mercenaries to weaken the LCD government.  
END COMMENT.  
MURPHY